RELIGION

AND THE

MAN IN THE STREET

BY

WILLIAM B. KINKAID, B.D.

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The chapters composing this booklet are five addresses delivered during Lent 1930, in Trinity Church, New York, at the Midday Services for business people. They are published at the request of some who heard them at that time, in the hope that others may find them helpful.

The writer is conscious of a debt to many whose thoughts he has appropriated, and would especially make acknowledgement to the Bishop of Bloemfontein, from whose book "Have You Understood Christianity" he has had much help.

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CHAPTER I

THE MAN IN THE STREET HAS HIS SAY

RELIGION seems to be about the only department of life in which almost every man thinks himself capable of setting up as an expert.

It is not so in other things. We are fairly humble, and willing to take the word of those who have studied medicine when something goes wrong with our bodies. We seek a lawyer when we need legal advice. We send our children to school; and when we want to increase our own education we go to one who knows the subject we want to study. In our financial dealings, if we are wise, we take the advice of our bankers or someone else who has made a specialty of investments. There are, it is true, some people who do not like doctors, and try to cure their physical ills by medicating themselves with the nostrums they see advertised in the newspapers or in the windows of drugstores; there are some, too, who follow the same method in their investments; but in general this is recognized as a very dangerous procedure, and the number of those who follow it is comparatively small.

But in religion it is different. Here things seem to have come to the pass where every

man's guess is as good as another's—and in his opinion a good deal better than most—and he is willing to argue his stand with a good deal of vigor and heat with anyone who will listen. At least he is willing to do it, and eager to do it, if he belongs to one of the new, wildcat, patent-medicine religions that have found so fertile a field in our land in the last generation. All too frequently those who still cling to some remnants of the Christian religion are mute and inarticulate when it comes to giving a reason for the faith that is in them.

If you were to ask that mythical person the "average man", the man outside the Church, the one we hear so much about as the "man in the street", what he thinks about the Christian religion, you would get a great variety of answers.

You would hear very often that he doesn't think much of it as it is exemplified by the men he knows who pretend to be Christians. That is a favorite argument (if it is an argument) against the Christian religion: "I am just as good as the people who belong to the Church. I know a lot of them in business, and from what I know of them I can't see that their religion does very much for them. They go to Church on Sunday, but it doesn't seem to make them any more honest or any less grasping and mean during the week". Of course it is really no argument against

Christianity. It means only that such a man has had the misfortune of meeting people, like us, who do not live up to their Christian profession. It is perfectly true that we are all pretty poor examples of the value of our religion, that we none of us practise our religion as we should, and in failing to do it we are making possible just this sort of criticism of the things we profess to hold sacred. But it is a just criticism of us Christians only—not of the Christian religion.

But there will be other answers too. We shall find some who will survey us with a superior and almost pitying condescension: "O yes, I guess it is all right if you are willing to be taken in by it. It is good for the poor: it makes them satisfied with their lot in this world because they think they will have a good time in another world hereafter. It is good for the young too; it keeps them out of mischief and helps them to go straight while they are growing up. Of course when a man is grown he can get along pretty well by himself and leave churchgoing and religion to women and children. But I think you church people ought to be doing something about the fast younger generation. They aren't old enough yet to get along without some kind of religion". Religion, you see, in his mind is a sort of police system, or a bogie with which you

can frighten the young into being decent and moral.

And another thinks it is good for people when they are overcome by some terrible disaster, when failure in business comes, or the death of someone who is much beloved; it is a steadying thing to have something to hold fast to when everything else seems to be slipping. But it will be time enough to think about that when the need arises!

But I suppose the largest number of those whom you asked for an opinion of the Christian religion would say something like this: "As a matter of fact, I don't take much stock in it. I used to go to Sunday School when I was a boy, I learned the Catechism and was confirmed, I used to know all the stories about the big men in the Old Testament; why, I must still have around the house somewhere a prayerbook I got as a prize. But I went to college and got fed up on going to church because we had compulsory chapel and had to go every morning, and I got enough to last me all my life.

"And then of course what we learned in college made me see that the Christian religion was not as certain a thing as we had been led to believe when we were children. We studied comparative religion, and saw that some of the doctrines of Christianity are taken over bodily from old heath-

en religions, that a belief in a God who became incarnate is not peculiar to Christianity, that even the doctrine of the Holy Communion closely resembles what was taught by some of the old Greek mysteries, and they were heathen and vile.

"And there is so much discussion about religion in these days, and so much difference of opinion among Christians, and so much bad feeling between different kinds of churches, that one cannot tell what to believe. You've got the Catholics saying Jesus is God, and the Protestants saying he was just a good man; you've got one group saying that the Virgin Mary was the mother of God, and others that she was just the wife of a Jewish carpenter. One lot believe, because they think the Bible says it, that God made the world in six days of twenty-four hours each, and the other treat the Bible like any other book and say it is as full of mistakes as a sieve is full of holes. One man says that Jesus rose again after his crucifixion, and the man in the next church preaches that the apostles just saw a ghost or something, or their minds were disordered because of their disappointment at not being made rulers in the kingdom they were expecting him to set up, and their whole account of his resurrection was the product of disordered minds; or else they invented the story in order to save

something out of the wreck of their hopes. Some of you Christians believe that Christ is really present on the Altar in the Holy Communion, and others who are also Christians think you are just superstitious and believers in magic. Some of you believe in one God, some of you believe in three, and some of you seem to have filled what you call heaven with a regular swarm of minor deities, of saints and angels and that sort of thing, until it is just like the polytheism of the ancients. How is anyone to know what to believe?

"I'll tell you what I think":—(I knew it was coming; I knew that in spite of his confusion and puzzlement he would soon be prescribing for us) —"I'll tell you what I think: It really doesn't make any difference what church you belong to, or whether you belong to any or none. It doesn't make any difference what you believe, so long as you do what's right. I know Catholics and Protestants and Jews and Christian Scientists and New Thought and Ethical Culture and Theosophists and Rosicrucians and Holy Rollers and Two-seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinationists (whatever that is), and I tell you they are all pretty much alike. It doesn't make any difference what church they belong to; it is just a matter of what kind of men they are themselves. Some of them keep the Sabbath on Sunday and some

of them keep Sunday on Saturday; some of them won't eat meat on Friday, and some won't eat it on any day of the week. Some of them go to Mass on Sunday mornings and play cards or dance all the rest of the day; and some of them would think themselves headed straight for hell if they so much as looked at a playing card or danced so much as a jig-step, and they wouldn't sew on a button on Sunday. But they are all just about the same when you get down to brass tacks.

"I tell them all they are making a lot of fuss about nothing. If you just do the best you can, what difference does it make whether you go to church or not? I guess that if there is a God, He isn't going to be small enough to hold it against you. All you've got to do is to try to be decent and respectable, and everything will be all right. And any of my friends will tell you that I'm respectable. Of course I swear a little now and then, and maybe there are a few other things I do that I used to think weren't just right, but I'm no worse than a lot of other people I know, and I'm a good deal better than some of these hypocrites that are going to church all the time. Ask the men at the club—ask the other members of Rotary, they know me pretty well—and they will tell you that if there is a God and a heaven, God ought to be glad to fill heaven up

with such fellows as you will find in Rotary. That's religion enough for me and it ought to be enough for anybody."

And that's enough of that. I am not trying to make a straw man just for the pleasure of knocking him down. I know that that is the sort of thing that is being said all the time. You have to listen to it in your offices, in your clubs, sometimes from visitors in your homes. I know, because some of you have told me so. Indeed, I know that there are times when some of you say the same sort of things yourselves.

It all sounds so broadminded and tolerant and modern and intelligent, doesn't it? But it isn't so really. In most cases it is simply what the psychologists call a defence-mechanism; that is, it is an effort of the part of the "man in the street" to protect himself from the discomfort which he is afraid might come to him if he were to allow himself to be "sold" on the Christian religion; it is just a bolstering up of his own courage to fight against the thought that is never very far from his mind, that perhaps there may be something in this business of the Christian religion after all. It is just an effort to justify his own position.

I should like, if you will allow me, to examine with you some of these objections on the part of the man in the street. We cannot undertake to

consider them all: but some of them are worth thinking about, for our own good as well as for his. Let us think about these questions in the following chapters:

1. Is it true that it makes no difference what you believe, so long as you live a good life?
2. Is it true that acceptance of the Christian religion "cramps a man's style" and interferes with his personal liberty? And what if it does?
3. Is it a condemnation of the Christian Religion that there are bad and hypocritical people in the Church, or that some of our ceremonies and rites seem to have sprung from heathen sources?
4. What is the vital thing about the Christian Religion anyway?

"There is, after all, you know, only one reason why anyone should be a Christian. Not because it saves one from despair, not because it acts as a preventive of social revolution by keeping the poor contented and capital secure, not because it is the religion that our mothers believed in, or because we think it may curb the unruliness of our children. None of these. The only reason there is why anyone should be a Christian is that Christianity is true, and the only true religion." And it works!

CHAPTER II

WHY BOTHER ABOUT A CREED?

We have undertaken to see, if we can, what is the attitude of that so-called "man in the street" towards the Christian religion. We have undertaken this, not only out of curiosity but also because we are sincerely eager to help him to see our side of the question and also because we hope that we ourselves may receive some benefit from such an examination, not only in the way of clarifying our own ideas but also that we may perhaps be able to give him an answer to some of his questions when he asks us a reason for the faith that is in us.

There is a certain formula, almost a slogan it might be called, which is very popular with this man in the street. It seems to sum up the whole of his philosophy about life and religion. We all have heard it time after time. The first time we heard it, it sounded so wonderfully good that doubtless we were quite impressed by it and were inclined to think that there must be a good deal in it. It sounds so broadminded, so tolerant, so generous, so distinctly in the live-and-let-live manner, that we are almost ashamed to question it. You know the formula, the statement that

one hears so often: "Well, after all, it doesn't make any difference what you believe, so long as you do what's right. The important thing is not that you should subscribe to a creed, but that you should live a good life."

It does sound broadminded and expansive and tolerant—and all the other nice generous adjectives one can think of seem to fit it. It sounds almost like the last word in a broad-gauge, charitable philosophy. There is, indeed, only one thing wrong with it—just one thing. That is that it means precisely nothing at all. It is an almost perfect example of the hold which arrant stark twaddle can take upon what we are pleased to call our minds, when we have allowed them to become fat and flabby through lack of exercise. Just transfer the words to some other activity of life and see how they sound. "It makes no difference whether you have an engine in your automobile or not, so long as you can drive it safely." "It makes no difference whether the liner on which you sail has a rudder or not, so long as it gets you into port all right on the other side of the sea." Nonsense, isn't it? Yet it is not a whit more nonsensical than the other. It would make no difference that your car had no motor, if only it would run without one. It would make no difference that the ship had no rudder, if only it could be steered without one.

The point is of course, that the car won't run without a motor or the ship steer without a rudder. It is equally impossible for one to do what is right unless he believes what is right. For it is only as one believes, that one has either the motive power or the ability to keep on the straight course as one pursues his way across the ocean of this life. Some of us have seen automobiles running without power, some of us have seen ships with useless rudders; but the automobiles were running down hill, and the ships were drifting. That is what one's life does too, without the motive power and steering wheel of right belief. It merely drifts about at the mercy of the winds and the sea; or it runs down hill, gathering momentum in its downward course until it ends in a crash at the bottom.

Of course we recognize the absurdity of such a statement in our practical life. We don't use this large charity and tolerance about the criminal or the madman. The criminal doubtless believes quite sincerely that the world owes him a living and that he has a right to collect that living in any way he can. Believing this, he does what is right in his own eyes: he steals our money and threatens our life and makes us fill our streets with armored cars. Does it make no difference what he believes?

You have heard of the poor man who spends

his life looking for a piece of toast to sit on because he believes he is a poached egg. Does it make no difference what he believes so long as he does what's right? Of course, the very fact that he does not believe the truth makes it impossible for him to do what is right. His wrong belief compels him to wrong action. Action is always dependent on belief.

Now the trouble with the man who makes the statement which we are examining is that he does not know what Christian belief is. He thinks it means the mere learning and reciting of a form of words or at best the intellectual acceptance of the sometimes obscure statements made in the accepted Creeds. If that is the only kind of belief our man in the street has seen, then I should be almost willing to agree with him that it does make no difference what you believe in that way. For belief of that sort is absolutely dead and sterile and worthless. It is a lower form than even the devils have, for theirs does affect them to some extent—"the devils believe and tremble" —at least they tremble.

But Christian belief is something more than the mere acceptance of a formal Creed, something more than an intellectual exercise. Christian belief involves the whole of a man's being. You remember Donald Hankey's words perhaps, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian,

but it takes all the man he is." So it is with Christian belief; it takes all the man we are. True belief begins in the intellect indeed, but it does not stop there. That is where the seed is planted, but it lies dormant or it dies unless it sinks its roots in the emotions so that we love him in whom we believe, and then goes on to flower and bear fruit in the will in a life of fixed and passionate devotion and action in tune with His will.

For notice that what Christians profess is not belief of a lot of things about God. No, what we say is "I believe *in* God." It is belief, you see, in a person. Do you see how that at once takes it out of the realm of mere intellectual, impersonal acceptance of old formulas? Think of the one you respect most in the world—the one of whom you can truly say "I believe in him." What do you mean? You don't mean simply that you believe such a person exists, that he lives in such a street, that he is so many feet tall and weighs so many pounds. That isn't believing in the person, is it? No, what you mean is that you are absolutely and unalterably convinced of the integrity, the trustworthiness, the wisdom, the good principles, of the man, so that you would be willing to entrust to him your fortune, your prospects, your reputation—even, if your belief in him is strong enough, your very life and

the lives of those you love. It means too that you would make sacrifices for that man, that you would fight for him if need arose, that you would no longer consider your friend anyone who attacked or spoke slightingly of him. That is something of what it means to believe in a person.

It is just that that true Christian belief entails. When we stand up on our feet and say "I believe in God" there is all that behind it. It is a person we are speaking of, a person in whom we believe. Not just believing things about him, but believing in him—in Him who made us and all the universe, in Him who was born as man, and lived and suffered and died on the cross for us, in Him who dwells within us to guide and enlighten and sanctify us.

Does it make no difference what we believe? Why I venture to say that if all the world, every man and woman and boy and girl in the whole world believed, really and actually and actively believed, in just the one first clause of the Apostles Creed, this world would no longer be the miserable, unhappy, wicked, sordid place it is but would be transformed at once into heaven.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty." What would it mean if all men really believed that? It would mean that every cloud would disappear from the face of the earth as the sun disperses

the dark at dawning. To know and believe in God as our Father, our Father who loves us above the love of any earthly father; and our Father who loves us and is Almighty—it is just too much to take in! For if he bears that relationship to me, this Almighty Creator of the Universe, then what is there that I need fear? I am safe in His Almighty care. But then if he is our Father, really our Father, don't you see what follows? It follows that we all are brothers and sisters. O if we could believe it! How all the inequalities of life would disappear, how struggles would cease, how sin would vanish away! One cannot sin against his own brother or his own sister; at least children of such a Father as ours cannot. One cannot enslave his brother; one cannot grind his face in the earth because one happens to possess a little more gold; one cannot take his brother's life because he has something one wants for oneself. To live as a child toward God, to live as a brother or a sister toward all the world; that is possible only to the one who believes in God the Father Almighty. Does it make no difference what one believes?

One could go thus through the whole Creed. Does it make no difference whether one believes in our Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven and was made man that he might heal the breach that sin had made between man and God?

Does it make no difference whether one believes in the Holy Spirit, when "Every virtue we possess, and every conflict won, and every thought of holiness, are his alone?"

When you stand sad and desolate beside the grave into which has just been lowered all that is mortal of one you loved more than life itself, does it make no difference whether you believe in the Communion of Saints? It may make this difference: that in the one case you may turn away with a new light in your eyes and a new courage in your heart because you know the separation is but for a little while and you can wait in hope for the day when you will be reunited; and in the other case you may turn from that grave that buries all your hopes, to seek some dark corner where you may blow out your brains because you cannot face life alone. Does it make no difference what you believe?

When you yourself stand on the shore of that dark sea, trembling as you begin that journey which each must take alone, will it make no difference then whether you believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting? Will it be all one whether you believe that the night is eternal and the darkness impenetrable and that the end has come, or whether you believe that the morning will break and the darkness

flee away, and that you will awake in the glad sunshine of a new day? How, in God's name, can anyone face death, how, in God's name, can anyone face life, unless he believes?

Look about you on the world. All the sin, all the cruelty, all the selfishness, all the breakdown in our own day of common decency which wrings our hearts—all is due to the breakdown of faith in God.

I tell you that when we Christians stand up to affirm our faith and recite the Articles of our Belief, it should be a glorious thing. Trumpets should sound, drums should roll, cannon should shake the very foundations of the earth. For to the Christian it is his oath of allegiance, his pledge of fealty, his battle cry, his challenge to all the powers of darkness.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world —even our Faith."

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH INTERFERES WITH FREEDOM

There is another criticism of the Christian religion and the Christian Church which is frequently made by the so-called "man in the street."

"I don't like the interfering that the church is always doing in the private lives of its members" he says. "You coax people into membership in the church and then at once you begin to dictate to them about the things they ought to do or not to do because they are Christians. You promise them a broader life, a richer life, a fuller life, a freer life, and then immediately begin to interfere with their freedom. You try to tell them that divorce and remarriage is wrong; you try to make them stick to the old ideas against birth control, and the sentimental notions about what you call personal purity and self-control.

"Don't you know that all those old notions are dated? Don't you know that what the modern age insists upon is freedom, and the reason why you are losing your hold on the modern young people is that you refuse to countenance the freedom they insist upon and are taking? Perhaps they do go a little too far," he says "but after

all they are right, and I am on their side. I want freedom. I want to be free to do anything I want to do. I don't want to be bound by any restrictions. And I certainly do object to having any church presume to tell me what I can do and what I can't.

"Why, you even begin with the children. Almost the first thing you teach them in that Catechism of yours is that they must give up things; you teach them that when they were little babies they were bound by their Godmothers and Godfathers to renounce the devil and the world and the flesh. I don't know what it's all about. I don't see how anyone who has to live in the world can be expected to renounce the world or how anybody who has to live in a body can be expected to deny and renounce the flesh. But renounce, renounce, renounce! I don't want to renounce anything. I don't want to be forbidden to do anything I want to do; and as long as the Christian Church makes it a condition of membership that I should, I'll stay outside. What I want is freedom!"

Yes, of course; what we all want is freedom. But has it ever occurred to you that there are several different kinds of freedom, and that all freedom, freedom of whatever kind, is attainable only at a price? The price of freedom is restraint, renunciation, the refusal to have anything to do

with those things which interfere with the freedom we have chosen for ourselves. It sounds like a paradox to say that all freedom is dependent on restraint. But it is absolutely and unalterably true. If you want freedom, you must consent to be bound; if you want liberty, there are some liberties which you must not take.

When we stop to think, we know that is true in every part of our life. If you want to be free to eat anything you please, then you must be pleased not to eat some things. If you want the freedom that comes with good health, then you must be bound by the laws of health. If you want to keep your freedom from prison, then you must put yourself under the domination of the laws of the country or the state and refrain from certain things which at some particular time you might feel you'd like to do. If you want the freedom to move in good society, you must be willing to sacrifice, to renounce, such of your own idiosyncrasies as are against the accepted code. If you want the freedom even to do business, you know perfectly well that there are certain things you must not do or you will be branded as a crook and no one will do business with you.

Of course, you are perfectly free to choose your own sort of freedom. But remember that one sort of freedom to some extent always, and

sometimes entirely, makes another sort of freedom impossible. That is to say, and you know it to be true, that the taking of certain liberties may make certain other liberties forever impossible for you. What sort of freedom do you want? Do you want freedom to wallow in the filth, or freedom to soar in the clear air of heaven? Do you want freedom to expose yourself to contagion by hanging over a sewer, or do you prefer the freedom of good health? Do you want freedom to crawl along the earth on your belly, or freedom to stand on your feet as a man? Do you want freedom to make yourself the slave of sin, freedom to be dragged down by every temptation that besets you, or do you want the glorious liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free?

Some want one kind of freedom, and some another. You are free to choose. And you must choose; you cannot have both kinds. And having made your choice, then you must renounce. Having decided where you want to go, you must give up the desire to go somewhere else. You must learn and follow the routes that will bring you to the destination you have chosen. Do always bear in mind that renunciation means the sacrifice of some lower thing for the sake of something higher—the refusal to do the thing that would impede your progress.

Now that Baptismal vow to which our friend

the man in the street objects has precisely that for its object. You will perhaps remember how it goes: "That I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh."

"That I should renounce the devil and all his works"; what does that mean? It means that applying for and being granted our naturalization in the Kingdom of Heaven we forswear all allegiance to any other kingdom. It means that being enlisted as soldiers in the army of God and being sealed with the sign of our salvation, we bind ourselves to be loyal to our Captain—that's all. It means that in all our decisions in life we are to remember, and be guided by the remembrance, that we have taken our stand on the side of right and must not be disloyal; we must not desert to the enemy.

And then, "that I should renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world". What does that mean? Does it mean that we are all to cut ourselves off from any dealings with this world and shut ourselves up in monasteries and nunneries? It certainly does not. God does call some to do that, and it is a high and holy vocation for those to whom the call comes; but most of us must stay in the world and live our lives here. Nor does it mean that we are to refuse to

enjoy the beauties and the comforts of the physical world. That world in its order, its grandeur, its beauty, speaks of its Creator, Who made it for His children to enjoy, and we should find in it—we shall find in it if our eyes are open—evidences which will lead us to Him who upholds its order, loves its beauty, and gives meaning to its grandeur.

It is not the physical world we renounce. No; it is the world that is definitely and actively anti-Christian, definitely against God; the thing we have in mind when we speak of a "worldly" man or woman, a "worldly" attitude toward life. Now what is wrong with such a man or woman or such an attitude toward life? Just this: that God is left entirely out of account. Such an one lives as if there were nothing to be considered but this world and what can be got out of it, nothing to be taken into account but one's own selfish pleasure or ambition or fame or position; nothing to be sought after but the things that this world offers and values. The Christian is called upon to renounce this attitude toward life because it is definitely beneath him, because he knows it is impossible to divide his allegiance between God and Mammon, because he is striving for a higher freedom and he cannot jeopardize that freedom by becoming enslaved to the things of the world. To "renounce the pomps

and vanities of this wicked world" means simply to maintain a right standard of values, and to put first things first.

And the third renunciation that we Christians are called upon to make is "all the sinful lusts of the flesh". The word "lusts" here is of course used in its original meaning of "desires"—all the sinful desires of the flesh. Does this mean that Christians believe that the body is inherently bad and that none of its desires is to be gratified? It certainly means nothing of the kind. It means simply that the body must be kept in its place as a servant of the soul, and not allowed to become the master. It means that the reins must be held with a firm hand and this horse which we drive kept under control, and not allowed to run away with us. It means that those things which are meant for good ends must not be prostituted to unworthy uses.

Every appetite of the body is given us by God, and is in itself good. The appetite for food is given for the upbuilding and strengthening of the body for the work it has to do. The appetite for sleep is to "knit up the raveled sleave of care", to repair and renew the body when it is worn and weary. The sexual appetite is for the increase and propagation of the race so that men and women may be workers together with God in bringing into the world new citizens of

the Kingdom of Heaven. But as it is with every gift of God, so it is with these; they can be misused and prostituted and directed toward wrong ends. The hunger urge can drag us down to gluttony and drunkenness; the sleep urge can be so overindulged that it results in sloth; the sexual appetite can degenerate into bestiality and the grossest impurity and vileness.

It is this prostitution of God's gifts that we have promised to renounce, to renounce not so that we may be hampered, but precisely so that we shall NOT be bound down. Who that has known anything about it doesn't realize what a fearful tyranny the body can exercise if it is allowed? We Christians have chosen the higher freedom, the glorious liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. And having chosen that freedom we strive to renounce all that interferes with it.

That is why we say to the body, "Thus far you may go and no farther". That is why we say to the world, "My first loyalty is to something higher than you; say what you like, my road lies here". That is why we say to Satan, "Get thee behind me, for thou savorest not the things that be of God!"

That way lies the only true freedom.

CHAPTER IV

SOME MORE OBJECTIONS

We are considering some of the criticisms of the "man in the street", a somewhat mythical person, yet representative of a class with which we are all familiar. You know him in your offices, you men and women. He likes to argue religion with you, even though he doesn't seem to know much about it at first hand. We of the clergy know him too, though not so commonly nor so intimately as you. Too often, he doesn't let himself go when talking with us. He is somewhat restrained and perhaps too anxious to be respectful. I wish he would be more natural. I assure you we should understand him. We might not be able to answer all his questions to his full satisfaction, for we do not claim to be omniscient; but we should be entirely sympathetic, and should make an honest effort to find the answers. The trouble is that all too often he is content to read about and listen to arguments on the other side, and won't take the trouble to find out what Christianity has to say for itself.

There are two questions of this "man in the street" I want to consider in this chapter. The first has to do with the fact that there are bad and hypocritical people in churches. The sec-

ond is one that has bothered him from his college days: it has to do with apparent resemblances between some of our Christian rites and old pagan observances.

I

CHURCHES ARE FULL OF HYPOCRITES

"Don't talk to me about church-going Christians", says our man in the street; "the churches are full of crooks and hypocrites. I know a lot of people who call themselves Christians. Some of them are pretty strict about the outward observances enjoined on them by their religion. They wouldn't think of eating meat on Friday or being absent from church on Sunday morning or on what they call holy days. Others claim to be as good Christians as these, but they don't care anything about fast days or seasons, and they generally spend Sunday in their motors or out on the links at the country club. And whichever group they belong to, I know this: In any business deal I have to watch these Christians just as closely as I do the man who is just an out-and-out pagan and makes no pretension of being religious at all. I notice that they are all on their toes to get the best of me and of each other. They are on a lot of important committees for raising money and that sort of thing for

their different churches (how they love having their names on committees!) and I notice that when their pastor comes in to the office they are so careful of the way they talk that butter wouldn't melt in their mouths; but you should hear their conversation when a bunch of us are swapping stories in the smoking room! I know they talk big about the high moral ground on which their church stands in regard to divorce, but you can't tell me that they either tell their wives about it or mention it to their priests in confession every time they run up to a tea-dance with a good-looking stenographer or take a chorus-girl out to supper. That's one great trouble I see with the Christian Church: it's so full of hypocrites and other people who are no better than they should be. I am just as respectable as most of the men I know who belong to churches and a good deal better than some, so I think I will just stay outside and make no pretensions to be anything different from what I really am."

Now, as I have said before, the worst of this criticism is that it is to such a large extent true. It is our gravest responsibility, the fact that outsiders can point to us who are in the church and say, "There you are; that's all this church and Christianity business amounts to—look at him: look at her: if that's all it means to be a Christian then I'm not having any". We ought

to hang our heads in shame and beat our breasts in penitence and cry "God be merciful to me a sinner" whenever we think of the fearful results of our failure to live up to our high privileges and responsibilities. If we would only remember that the truth or falseness of our religion is being judged by those with whom we live and work and play on the basis of what sort of men and women we are, what a difference it would make! Does it ever occur to you that you may be bearing witness to your religion or erecting barriers against it by the way you behave about so small a thing as insisting that a window in the office should be opened or closed? Do you ever think that someone may be attracted to Christianity or repelled from it by your behavior in a subway crowd or by the hour at which you shut off your radio at night? Does it never suggest itself to your mind that some questionable deal in business may do more harm to the half-heathen here at home than all your gifts to missions can do good to the heathen in foreign lands? It is true. We Christians, we formal, half-hearted, inconsistent Christians, are the worst enemies of the Christian religion. If Christians would really live like Christians—for one whole year, or a month, perhaps even just for one day—the world would see and believe. The trouble is not that Christianity does not

work; the trouble is that Christians do not work at it.

And yet this question and this criticism of the church because of the kind of people he finds in it indicates a serious misapprehension on the part of the man in the street regarding the nature and purpose of the church. It is quite evident that he thinks of the church as a sort of club, an organization of people banded together to seek and to get mutual help in seeking, the Kingdom of Heaven. That is indeed the theory on which many of the man-made churches are organized and operate, but it is not true of the church as our Lord founded it. That church is not an organization of men and women seeking the Kingdom of Heaven: it is the Kingdom of Heaven seeking men and women. It is not a human society blindly groping to find God; it is God trying (through human agents indeed, but it is God doing it), God trying to reach men and women and draw them to himself that he may heal and strengthen and feed and direct them. It is not a club for saints; it is a hospital for sinners. From this point of view, surely it is no criticism of the Christian Church that there are sinners in it. Rather it is its glory: that is what it is here for. The criticism is the same as the one made against our Lord: "Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" said

the Scribes and Pharisees to the disciples. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" was their condemnation of him. Our Lord's defence was the same in each case: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Looking at the Church from this point of view, as a hospital for sinners, which is what it really is, don't you see how unreasonable this criticism is? As well criticize a hospital because there are sick people in it. What would you think of a man who when advised to go to a hospital, replied, "Oh, I guess not! I know several people in that hospital and some in every hospital in town, and I'm just as well as any of them, and a good deal better than some. When the people in hospitals are all well, then it will be time enough to talk to me about coming in, but until that time I think I'm just as well off, here on the outside." You wouldn't think much of that, would you? And yet that is just what this criticism of the church amounts to.

The church has a lot of sinners in it, and I'm glad it has. For the work of the church is to gather in all the sinful people in the world, in order that they may be put into the way of getting health for their souls, just as the work of a hospital is to gather in all the sick people, in

order that they may find health for their bodies. It is true that even after coming into that hospital, many of us fail to do our part in obeying the rules, many of us ignore the doctor's orders, many of us fail to take the remedies prescribed and are careless about our diet and our exercise. It is true that some lose sight of their reason for being in the hospital at all and behave as if it were just a sort of respectable but lazy country club. But that, after all, is our fault and not the fault of the hospital. The history of this hospital shows a wonderful record of cures, records of men and women brought in in the last stages of the leprosy of sin, who by the application of remedies prescribed by the Great Physician and by the faithful cooperation of the patients themselves have been restored to soundness of health and happiness of life. Of this I am certain: that the failures are not the fault of that Great Physician. We internes blunder and fail in our duty, God knows, and part of the fault is ours. But the rest of the fault lies in the patients themselves. Sin can be cured in the hospital of the church and no where else that I know of. Don't criticize the church because there are sinners in it: That is what the church is for. It would be much more intelligent to get yourself examined by the Spiritual Life Extension Society—the Society for the Ex-

tension of Life into Eternity—and see what treatment you may need so that you may not fail to attain to Life Everlasting.

II

THERE ARE HEATHEN SURVIVALS IN CHRISTIANITY

The other question of the man in the street is rather an academic one. It seems to give him a good deal of satisfaction to ask it, for it is somewhat highbrow and indicates that he hasn't forgotten quite everything he learned at college. "I have studied something of comparative religion", he says, "and I find some strange resemblances between the beliefs and practices of Christianity and those of the old pagan religions. Christianity isn't the only religion that has believed in a God who became incarnate and came down to live with men—others have believed that too. And I read of lustral washings that closely resemble your Baptism. And some of the old religions, especially the Greek mysteries, had observances that were practically the same as your rite of Holy Communion. Isn't it true that the Christian religion is just full of survivals from the vile and disgusting religions of the heathen?"

"And the moral of that is", as Lewis Carroll says, the moral of that is that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Instead of such resem-

blances being an argument against the truth of our religion, they seem to me to be one of the strongest arguments that it is true and has been true from the beginning of time.

I think of God as the great Source of Light, through all the history of the world striving to reveal himself to man. Man's weakness and man's sin were like a heavy pall of smoke and fog settled down upon him. His eyes were dim and could but imperfectly distinguish what the Light strove to reveal; his ears were heavy so that he could not hear; his understanding was warped so that he could not correctly comprehend. The Light was always shining, the Truth was always the truth, but the darkness was slow in dissipating. And so we find varying degrees of comprehension of the light and of God's truth. At first only a small ray succeeded in penetrating the gloom, and that in a grotesque and distorted shape, and in consequence we have those obscure and uncertain manifestations of religious feelings that show themselves in the earliest forms of religion, in nature worship, in ancestor worship, in totemism, and things of that sort.

But as mankind progressed, so the light grew, so his grasp of the truth increased, imperfect always, but ever going on toward a full comprehension. Animal sacrifices, even human sacrifices, are, as we can see now, but the result of imperfect understanding of the truth finally pro-

claimed from the pulpit of the cross—the truth that love must sacrifice itself, that God must die for his people. The rites of the Greek mysteries were but the faint shadowy images of the truth that he who died for those he loved would give himself to them to be the food for their souls; that he would give them his own Body and Blood that he might dwell in them and they in him. It was not until the Sun of Righteousness arose that the light finally and fully broke through and the revelation was complete. Then that which before was but dimly comprehended was made clear; that which man had been striving after from the beginning was placed within his reach; that light which God had been trying to shed upon man burst out in a blaze of glory.

Does it prove the falseness of the real that there have been previous fragmentary visions of it and unsuccessful efforts to know it? Doesn't it rather help to establish the reliability of the revelation? Let me show you what I think is somewhat analogous: There is an old Greek myth which some of you know which tells of Daedalus and Icarus and how they determined to fly. The end of their experiment was, you remember, that Icarus flew too near the sun and the heat melted the wax in which his wings were fastened, and his experiment ended in his death. So lately as my own youth I remember

some verses of doggerel which were very popular, which told of Darius Green and his flying machine; those of you who are as old as I will remember them. Darius was a stupid farmer who decided that if the birds could fly he could too; he rigged up some sort of apparatus and climbed up to the ridge pole of the barn to take off. His experiment ended ignominiously in the muck of the barnyard. Now, would it be intelligent for a man in these days to say, "There is nothing in this flying business; the whole thing is simply a survival of the old Greek myth of Icarus; it is as foolish as Darius Green and his flying machine"? It would not. We should say to him, "Man, look up and see the airplanes in the sky! Get in one and try it for yourself!"

And so it is with the church. The fact that the revelation which God was striving to give to men of himself and his truth and his method of salvation was perceived only in part, and that distorted and deformed because of the weakness of men, is no argument against the true religion. The answer is the same. The Christian religion works. Look up and see. You, Darius Green, shake yourself free from your barnyard view of life! Get in and give your soul the joy of an escape from the sordid atmosphere of earth to the clear air of heaven. Give yourself the thrill of a real joy ride! Look up! Climb in and try it for yourself!

CHAPTER V

WHAT IS THE REAL QUESTION?

We have asked the "man in the street", the so-called "average man", what he thought about the Christian religion; and we have been trying to clear up some of the questions in his mind. We found him in a somewhat muddled and puzzled state, and yet apparently he felt quite competent to pronounce dogmatically on a good many subjects, to state quite definitely what he himself believes and, at greater length, what he does not believe. We found that he is conscious that a change has taken place in his feeling about religion since he was a boy. At that time he had been interested, perhaps devoutly interested, in the whole subject. He went to Sunday School and studied Bible stories; he learned the Catechism and was confirmed. But he has outgrown all that, he tells us. He was fed up with church-going when he was at school, and he never goes now except to a wedding or a funeral, though he still insists that his children must get up and go to Sunday School, while he stays at home to read the newspapers.

His mind is all mixed up by the things he learned in college about comparative religion. He reads the modern magazines and the news-

papers, and so far as he can see they don't leave Christianity a leg to stand on except as a sort of opium for the people, as the Soviet calls it, to make them more contented in the midst of injustice in this world by promising them a better time in a world that is to come. He sees Christian churches divided and the different sects warring against each other, one church teaching one thing and another teaching another, and each one saying that whatever the truth is, it certainly is not what its rival says it is.

He knows a lot of men in business who are members of different kinds of Christian churches, but their religion doesn't seem to make much difference in their lives. They are all pretty much alike. They all take every advantage they can in a business deal, so long as they keep within the fine line of the law. They all divorce their wives when tired of them, or don't take the trouble of getting a divorce. They all swear the same kind of oaths when angry; they all laugh heartily at a questionable story. They all take a cocktail when it is offered them or use a pocket flask when they get a chance. At least most of them do these things, and those who don't are probably milksops or hypocrites.

And so, with all this contention among the churches, with this conflict between science and religion, this war between modernists and fund-

amentalists, this inconsistency in the lives of pretending Christians, he is all mixed up.

And yet he is quite ready to tell us dogmatically about his belief. We find it mostly negative. He doesn't believe that doctrine makes any difference. He doesn't believe that it makes any difference what church you go to, or whether you go to none. All that matters is that you should do the best you can in this world and earn the respect of your neighbors, and then if there is a God and another world, it is pretty certain that you will get in just as well as those who bother about belonging to a church.

I don't want to be unjust to the "man in the street". I know a good many of him and in many cases I like him and admire him. He is generally broadminded and cheerful, kind to children and to the poor, and generous to all good works when his sympathy is touched. But he has one great fault—he hates to think.

That is the explanation for a good deal of his puzzlement about religion. The faith of his childhood got a jolt when he went to college, and he has never thought through his beliefs to the faith of a man. Of course he outgrew that early faith, just as he outgrew his clothes; but he didn't stop wearing clothes just because his legs grew too long for his trousers and his wrists stuck out of his sleeves! Yet

that is just what he did about his religion. He got on fairly well with it when he had the trusting faith of a child, but when the creation stories of Genesis began to be attacked, when Adam's rib and Jonah's whale seemed to be laughed out of court,—when his theological equipment began to be too small for his intellectual development —either he discarded the whole thing, or he has tried to make himself a new covering out of the so-called scientific articles in the monthly magazines, and the headlines of newspapers, and the conversations at his service-club luncheons. It is a rather patchworky sort of thing, and it doesn't hang together very well, but it has one advantage: it is easier to talk platitudes about service being the important thing, and to repeat the destructive things one has heard some smart cynic say, or to take the so-called broad view and prate about the indifference of what you believe so long as you do what's right,—it is easier to do that than it is to do a real job of thinking and get the thing straight in one's mind.

I wonder if the reason is that he is afraid to think the thing through! I wonder if he subconsciously feels that if he put himself in the way of being convinced that the Christian religion is true he would have to shake himself out of his self-satisfaction and bestir himself to live in accordance with the truth as he might learn

it. There is no doubt that it would be so. There is no doubt that every new conception of truth does entail certain modifications of conduct and life. Perhaps that is the explanation. We don't like to be jolted out of the easy-going rut.

There is no question, I say, that his is the easier way. It is much easier to dismiss things with the statement that you don't believe them than it is to examine them to see whether after all they may not be true. It is much easier to be content with one's life as it is, than to examine oneself to see whether there may be reasons for making that life something very different.

And the worst thing about it is that those who are loudest in their denials of the truth of the Christian religion are those who have never made a trial of it; have never even investigated the grounds of its teachings. There are grounds, and they are both rational and sound, and I believe with all my heart that they will convince anyone who with an honest and good heart will investigate them. I do not say that I can convince people of the truth of them, but I do say that I believe that if a man will honestly try to understand them he will be given the light of God's Holy Spirit so that he can comprehend and believe. But it must all start with thinking; thinking humbly, and thinking straight. Do you

think we can get the "man in the street" to do that?

And no straight thinking about religion, certainly no straight thinking about the Christian religion, can be done, it seems to me, without first facing the fact that there is one historical Figure that must be taken into account and explained. I ask you to look at a series of pictures:

The first is that of a group of thirteen men in surroundings far removed from us in years and miles, and especially of the One who is quite evidently the leader of that group, to whom the others look with respect and awe and something of bewilderment, as he goes about the land where he was born, healing the sick, cleansing the leper, raising the dead and setting people free from the awful slavery of sin. There he stands, the leader of that small group. Look first upon that Figure; he is a young man, only about thirty, and yet there is something about him that seems to be ageless. He looks worn and pale, but he is serene and strong; he seems to be almost worn out with the work he has been doing, and yet he seems to have inexhaustible vigor. Look on him, listen to his words, see him especially as he takes the little group into an upper chamber of a house in Jerusalem and does something strange and mysterious at the end of the Passover Feast, and then takes them

over the brook into the Garden of Gethsemane.

The second picture begins in darkness, a darkness so deep that we can see nothing at first. But presently, in the midst of the gloom, we begin to descry the outlines of a cross. And on that cross there He is—he, the one who though worn and pale is yet so serene and strong, the one whom we had seen going about doing good; He is hanging there with a thorn-crown on his head and nails through his hands and feet. We look on in silence until merciful death relieves the Sufferer, and the earth shudders as an even thicker darkness settles down upon it.

The third picture is full of light, a light so bright that it nearly blinds us; and in the midst of the glory there is standing the one we had seen before—the same one, but how changed! "One like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs are white like wool, as white as snow; his eyes are as a flame of fire, and his voice is as the sound of many waters." That voice comes to us strong and clear, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

There is just one more picture. It is not far to seek, indeed it is almost inescapable, for at every moment of the twenty-four hours of every day, somewhere in the world the picture is being presented before the eyes of men and of God. It combines all the pictures we have looked upon before: the Upper Room is there; the darkness of Calvary hovers over it; the triumphant glory of heaven shines all about it. It is a picture of a Christian Altar, where day by day He comes who liveth and was dead and behold is alive for evermore; the Christian Altar, where in accordance with his command his people gather to find him who said, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world."

That is where we must start: we must start by looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and for ever, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven—and was crucified—and rose again from the dead. Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ on the Cross, Jesus Christ on the throne of heaven, Jesus Christ on the Altar; the same yesterday, today, and forever. It is with Him that any straight thinking about religion must start, for He cannot be left out of account. O that men would honestly look upon Him and study Him before they begin to argue about the Christian religion!

If they would do that, they would have a wonderful experience. They would not fail to know his power. They would feel all that cloak of self-satisfaction dropping away, that cloak they have made for themselves out of the clever and smart cynicisms of the journals of the so-called intelligentsia and the coarse criticisms of the careless world. No more would they argue about the creation stories of Genesis or the difficulties presented by Adam's rib and Jonah's whale and Balaam's ass.

No, for in the presence of that Figure all such questions and cavilings sink into insignificance. They may have to be faced again later and thought out, but for the present something else is happening. We are gazing on a Face and listening to a Voice and feeling the beating of a Heart. And as we do that our heart cries out—not only our heart, but our whole being, our body and soul and spirit,—It is Jesus, my Lord and my God! Our eyes are opened and we know him, and with the faith of a little child, that faith we once had but thought we had lost forever, we throw ourselves at his feet.

O man in the street, that is the question that takes precedence over all your questioning: *What will you do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*

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